

BACKERS OF PLANE SALES CONFIDENT

By Walter Taylor

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Administration officials, backed by Democratic Leader Robert C. Byrd, claim they have enough votes to save President Carter's Middle East war-planes package in the expected show-down in the Senate next week.

Buoyed by an initial administration victory for the plane sales in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee yesterday, Byrd made plans for full Senate action on the package late Monday.

Support in the Senate is "a little more (for the sales) than the tie vote would indicate," Byrd said after the committee rejection on an 8-8 vote of a resolution recommending disapproval of the package. "As of now, I

think the votes are there to support the president's proposal."

Administration strategists, relying on their own head counts and polls by Byrd and Senate Republican Leader Howard H. Baker, believe they have firm commitments to support the sales from a clear majority of Senate Democrats and a near majority of Republicans in the chamber, with several additional members of both parties leaning toward approval of the package.

SEN. FRANK CHURCH, D-Idaho, who wound up opposing the Carter plan in the Foreign Relations Committee, acknowledged that current prospects favored the administration.

"I would have to say that the con-

cessions the president has offered to Israel give him the best possible chance of winning on the floor," Church said last night.

Church referred to Carter's commitment earlier this week to sell 20 additional F-15s, the United States' most sophisticated fighter plane, to Israel after 1983.

The planes would be in addition to the 15 F-15s and 75 F-16s Israel could receive under terms of the arms package now under review in Congress. The proposal before Congress also provides for the sale of 50 less-sophisticated F-5s to Egypt and, the most controversial aspect of the package, 60 F-15s to Saudi Arabia.

The Saudi sale is opposed by Israel

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those opposed specifically to sales to Middle East nations while peace efforts are under way.

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and many of its supporters in the United States because of the threat they contend it could pose to the security of the Jewish state. The so-called Israel lobby in Congress also opposes the sale on symbolic grounds, contending that sanctioning of the package in the face of Israeli opposition would raise questions about the traditional close relationship between Israel and the United States.

THE LOBBY, highly effective in the past, plans a hurry-up pressure campaign over the next three days in an effort to swing votes against the Carter proposals. Northern Democrats, many of whom have large Jewish constituencies, have been targeted for mailings, telegrams and lobbying efforts, according to opposition strategists.

Some senators on the Foreign Relations Committee who voted with the president yesterday, such as Democrat John Glenn of Ohio and Republican Charles Percy of Illinois, reportedly are on the target list.

Although many opponents originally objected to Carter's tactic of "packaging" the sales, they will be debated as a single proposal. This procedure, although dictated by successful opposition maneuvering in the Foreign Relations Committee yesterday, is likely to favor neither side.

Forces opposing just the Saudi portion of the package are hoping to attract strength from senators opposed to arms sales generally and from

THE ADMINISTRATION'S hand is likely to be strengthened by the senators' realization that disapproval of the package would mean a rejection for Egypt and its president, Anwar Sadat. Because of Sadat's peace initiatives in the Middle East and his severance of former military ties with the Soviet Union, there is little opposition to the Egyptian sale.

Administration officials indicated that their lobbying efforts on behalf of the package will stress the possibility that Sadat's political future could rest on the outcome of the arms package in the Senate.

The Senate Intelligence Committee, meanwhile, was considering declassification of a secret study that also could provide ammunition for the White House.

An analysis of the impact of Carter's proposals on the military balance in the Middle East, the study is reliably reported to conclude that the net effect of the sales would be to enhance Israel's military situation. Previous studies of the kind have concluded that the arms balance would be unaltered by the Carter proposals.

THERE CONTINUE to be concerns on both sides of the issue that Monday's debate, limited to 10 hours, could involve rhetoric offensive to the recipient countries.

"We're crossing our fingers that there won't be the kind of stuff going on out there that the Panamanians had to listen to" during the Panama Canal debate in the Senate earlier this year, said one administration official.